The Ballarat Naturalist

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The Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture 2025

"Ballarat's Nature Noted: A retrospective of Nature writing over four decades" by Roger Thomas, recipient of the Australian Natural History Medallion 2025

Held at the Ballarat North Community Centre, Friday 7 November 2025

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Secretary, Emily Noble spoke first about the legacy of Stella Bedggood, an exceptional field naturalist, educator, nature advocate and photographer in whose memory this lecture is dedicated. Stella Bedggood observed and researched flora and fauna in the Ballarat region from the 1950s until her death in 1978. Her contribution as a field naturalist was outstanding and as a mark of recognition, the Enfield Grevillea was named *Grevillea Bedggoodiana* in 1986.

Emily observed that Stella Bedggood and our guest speaker tonight, Roger Thomas, shared many attributes that make a good field naturalist - an early and ongoing interest and passion for nature, curiosity and meticulous record-keeping together with a generosity in sharing their knowledge. The hand-written observations that both Stella and Roger contributed over many years to records held by FNCB have been used to support successful campaigns that saved bushland and wetlands in the Ballarat region from destruction.

Having a wonderfully knowledgeable mentor helps too. They both shared a strong connection with fellow field naturalist, Jack Wheeler, our Club's only other winner of the Australian Natural History Medallion (1977) to date. He was a founding member of the FNCB and its inaugural Secretary (1952-57), a role he passed on to Stella. He also inaugurated the Nature Notes column in The Courier in 1958, writing the weekly column for 25 years before illness prompted him to hand-over the task to Roger in 1983.

Roger continued writing Nature Notes for 41 years - writing a total of 2,070 unique columns without a break! It is this remarkable accomplishment that was the subject of Roger Thomas' Stella

Bedggood Memorial Lecture and Emily noted that the inestimable impact and reach of these articles was a huge contributor to him being announced recently as the winner of the 2025 Australian Natural History Medallion, the highest honour in the country for a field naturalist/ natural historian.

Roger's lecture was illustrated with a selection of photographs and images of his printed columns and displayed how his column changed over the years with the advent of colour printing. His selection focused on the different topics he wrote about, highlights of discovery and observation and the changes he has seen in the last forty years.

Roger's columns aimed to educate readers about the local environment. Some typical examples shown were:
-the discovery of a fringe-myrtle in Enfield forest.
-finding out that pink heath was cultivated in the UK in the 19th Century (with different colour variations).
-showing photographs of sugary 'manna' that can be found under manna gums in summer.
-identifying mistletoes and the impact on their hosts at Mount Beckworth.
-introducing wildflower walks in the Canadian forest (including pop-up, self-guided walks).

Roger covered the problems of introduced weeds in the environment - his research showed that of 110 common weeds; two thirds were agricultural in origin and one third horticultural.

Another topic was the living museum of wildflowers in Victoria Park in the heart of Ballarat, where orchids are now flourishing in a managed section of the park.

Roger wrote about the legacy of Gordon Clarke AO, who donated land near Linton in order to protect and rehabilitate the habitat for birds. This is now the Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary, for which Roger was the original Warden.

Lake Wendouree was a topic that was of great interest to readers. Roger discussed the lakeweed that grows in the lake, the introduction of carp, numbers of cygnets each year and the changes that happened when the lake dried out during the Millennium Drought in 2006.

Questions from readers resulted in columns on albinism in birds, how to provide hollows for birds, whether to feed birds and a very nice story about a Red-eyed Tree-frog from Queensland that was found in a box of bananas in Skipton and was successfully returned home in a holidayer's handbag! Another wonderful tale was about a cat that was taken by a Powerful Owl but managed to wriggle free.

Other topics covered in Roger's Nature Notes were migratory birds, invasions of white butterflies/crickets/ European wasps, Orchard Swallowtail butterflies, stinging hairy caterpillars, scorpions and spiders and other creatures that readers had asked him about. Information about the different fungi found in the Ballarat region was always of interest to readers.

Roger discussed the decline of species that he had observed over forty years, including pygmy possums, bandicoots, tiger quolls and insects such as the Emperor Gum moth. The squirrels that were in Ballarat the 1950s to 1970s are no longer, and even kookaburras are less common. Koalas are much scarcer now - Mt Buninyong used to be the place to see them, but this is rare now.

Roger noted that some species have increased including the South African Weed Orchid, kangaroos, Cape Barren geese and Rainbow Lorikeets which were regarded as rare in 2005 but are common now. Geckos, Galahs and Crested Pigeons are now common too, and

flying foxes have taken up residence in the Ballarat Botanical Gardens during the warmer months.

A few columns about oddities included photographs of Yabby stones (a source of minerals for Yabbies when they grow into new shells), large snakes being rarely found now - only small ones, and the biodiversity benefits of removing redfin from dams.

Roger discussed the importance of Mount Beckworth as a valuable environment that should be given additional protection and cherished for the future.

Roger's last slide was of his last Nature Notes column in December 2024. His long-standing relationship with his readers has been hugely valuable and is sorely missed. He summed up his four decades of Nature Notes with "We have learnt a lot together."

Report by Sue Grey–Smith Images Carol H

Our Secretary Emily is presenting Roger with a copy of Susan Kruss's PhD Thesis titled "A Voice for Nature: A History of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat"

FNCB 9th NOVEMBER OUTING TO CLUNES BUSHLAND

About 20 members travelled to bushland north of Clunes for the Club's November outing, led by Roger Thomas. The morning was spent on private property adjoining the southern side of the Dunach Nature Conservation Reserve, where Yellow Gum, Grey Box and Long-leaf Box are the main eucalypts.

Items of interest included Box Mistletoes, including many dead ones from dead and drought-stressed trees. On the ground was discovered a dead Brush-tailed Phascogale, a sad sight, but welcome because it hopefully indicated that this marsupial remains in this forest after no sightings for many years.

We walked through an open grassy flat with numerous Sheep's Burr (Acaena echinata), finding a noteworthy colony of small, short-stalked puffballs (Tulostoma), then over a small drainage line to a dam where a cold-looking Jacky Lizard was much-photographed, not far from its presumed hole in the ground. A white mushroom here was *Amanita ochrophylla*.

We saw the only Daphne Heath on the property (flowering), and a couple of Prickly Guinea-flowers *Hibbertia exutiacies* (left) with the last of their yellow flowers, protected under wire guards. Bright yellow Sticky Everlastings (right) were numerous and attractive, as were Chocolate Lilies. Scarcer were Scaly Buttons, and the property's first few South African Weed Orchids *Disa bracteata*.

Many of us saw a pair of Mistletoebirds that uncharacteristically remained in the same spot for five minutes. Other birds included White-browed Babbler, Whistling Kite, Spotted Pardalote and Weebill.

Male Mistletoebird

Female Mistletoebird

After lunch in Clunes, we moved north again, this time to Clunes State Forest, on the opposite side of the main Maryborough road. Here we concentrated on wildflowers. Dainty Hooded Caladenias were a highlight, as were four or five white-flowered plants of Chocolate Lilies,(below) lacking any mauve or black pigment, but with yellow anthers and retaining the usual sweet Chocolate Lily perfume. Murnong (Yam Daisy), Bluebells, early Milkmaids and early Grass Trigger-plants were also of interest. We were too late for Beard-orchids.

Flowering shrubs included the rare Scented Bush-pea *Pultenaea graveolens*, named for its aromatic foliage, Parrot-peas, and Twiggy Bush-pea *Pultenaea largiflorens*.
Small Grass-trees and tough tussocks of Red-anther Wallaby-grass were common in parts, providing shelter for some of the wildflowers. Birds here included Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Spotted Pardalotes at their nest hole, and another Mistletoebird.
Report Roger Thomas. *Images Carol H, John P & Val H*

Scented Bush-pea
Pultenaea graveolens,

Clunes State Forest

Ballarat SEANA gathering held 17th– 19th Oct 2025 reviews

About 90 people registered for our weekend which was based at the Pax Hill Scout Camp, Ballarat East and the Saturday SEANA Meeting and evening meal with Guest speaker was held at the Ballarat Golf Club function room. Due to city traffic challenges, excursions were planned where participants were given a map and instructions to gather at a local meeting point or depart from Pax Hill– Most people chose the former option.

<u>SEANA Guest speaker Friday evening-</u>Nicole Kearney ,
Manager of the Biodiversity Heritage Library based at Museum Victoria.

Using many illustrations from our various club newsletters, particularly Ballarat's, Nicole gave us an overview of how to navigate the various sites and what information can be gained in researching Natural History subjects, people etc. Many of our clubs already upload our Newsletters and she urged others to do likewise. Nicole works from Museum Vic with Jack and other volunteers to scan and upload all material that is submitted. This includes hard copies of books, magazines, leaflets, as well as digital items fitting the natural history theme. This year Nicole's role has expanded to a world wide one. The Smithsonian Institute America had stopped funding this project and other sponsors have had to be found and a world wide committee formed. Short term funding is available, but longer term sponsors are being sought to continue this very valuable research project. Val H

Notes on Richard Weatherly's keynote presentation
Saturday 18 October 2025

The participants of SEANA 2025 Spring Camp were privileged to have the evening presentation given by Richard Weatherly OAM. He is a well-known ornithologist, artist, farmer, and community activist. He studied history at Cambridge University and has spent "over 50 years studying, painting and writing about birds". Richard has managed a pastoral property near Mortlake in Western Victoria for over 40 years, and has been deeply involved in creative landscape-scale revegetation projects on his farm and further afield. He has been acutely aware of the need for connectivity between natural and restored ecosystems.

Richard told the participants about his early family history which culminated in 6 generations of his family farming two properties near Mortlake. Farming in the 1800's presented many practical challenges which covered all the known hazards of fire, flood, drought, pests and poor prices at different times. The most amazing part of this story was the commitment over generations to record wildlife on the farm, and birds in particular. The diaries record the time of year and the species of birds observed. This has become a valuable data set created by one family on one farm over a very long time. Richard indicated that bird identification resources were very limited as no-one had produced specialised and authoritative bird books in early years. Richard, himself, managed to photograph many of the birds he observed – no mean effort.

One of the triggers for Richard to embrace ideas of sustainable farming, and an environmentally sensitive approach, was his experience as a land manager in having to deal with a 20 year long drought. He observed much damage in the landscape caused by degradation of pastures, river frontages, and the Hopkins River (which ran through the farm) itself. He believed that there had to be a better way. Richard observed that the bird populations that he valued so much had also been impacted by serious drought conditions.

He applied for and received financial assistance from, at least, the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority to fence livestock out of the Hopkins River and to protect the riparian zone. This allowed the river frontage and the Hopkins River to begin to heal. With his family and farm staff, he double fenced farm

paddocks to allow for revegetation to create windbreaks and wildlife corridors. He carried out earthworks to manage the movement of water on the farm to create wetlands and to rehydrate the farm. To facilitate an efficient and rapid revegetation technique, Richard worked with others to develop and build a direct seeding machine which could be drawn behind a tractor. This allowed for significant areas to be seeded and covered in trees and shrubs very quickly. The initial plantings are now decades old and are a contributing habitat for many species. The new and enhanced wetlands have attracted large numbers of water birds, including the iconic brolgas which regularly nest there.

Richard strongly believes all the environmental work on his farm, and pasture improvement, have increased the sustainability and resilience of the farm business. Over his time as farm manager, he has observed dramatic changes in bird populations in particular. He has seen the number of bird species recorded increase from approximately 170 to 240, and an associated increased activity in total numbers of all birds. Richard has also recorded changes in bird species, citing Rainbow lorikeets and Short- billed Corellas as examples of species that have become far more common in his time.

A lifetime living in and around wildlife has clearly inspired Richard Weatherly to become a well-known and well-loved artist, representing birds as we all love to see them – in the wild.

Many thanks, Richard Weatherly, for a window into one man's passion. Neville Oddie

Weekend SEANA Field Trips

Mt Buninyong Crater, Summit and Union Jack Reserve

On Saturday morning, our group of 20 admired the tall Messmate Stringybarks and Manna Gums on the walk up to the Mount Buninyong crater. Grass tussocks abounded between the old growth trees. We looked down into the crater while hearing the Wadawurrung dreamtime story about the origin of the mountain. The crater is populated with a dense covering of Red Anther Wallaby-grass (*Rytidosperma pallidum*). We then drove to the summit, with extensive views north over the rich basalt agricultural plain and west over the city of Ballarat to the Pyrenees. Our invited local birder, Joel Ellis, helped us to spot 33 bird species on this forested volcano. Nearby we walked within the Union Jack reserve, a site of remnant woodland and streamline vegetation. The site was heavily mined in the 1850s gold rush. We heard about the gold-mining history of the area and saw remaining evidence of this activity, coppiced trees, mine-shafts and mullock heaps. There were echidna scratchings next to the walking track in several places. Many seasonal wildflowers were observed, such as the Common Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis valida*, and Joel helped us to identify 23 bird species in the reserve.

Margaret Rich

Clarkesdale and Devil's Kitchen Scenic reserve

On both Saturday and Sunday, Emily who works part time at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary, escorted us around this favourite place near Linton. We began by stopping at a roadside area to view flora there. It included Waxlip, Common-Bird and the last of Leopard Orchids. A couple of Purple Beard orchids were also in flower. Emily was able to share, via a video on her phone, one being pollinated by an iridescent blue wasp that she had captured in action the previous week. Adding to the orchid list, later in the day we returned to the same area, and went into the paddock to view a large group of Mantis Spider Orchids which were still flowering.
For the remainder of the morning we drove into the Claire Miller grounds, parked the cars, then walked down to the "Bird paddock" and dam for an hour and half wander, viewing a few more flora varieties such as Yellow stars, Austral Bugel in flower, Chocolate Lilies, a few Golden Moth Orchids, a patch of Lowland Bird–Orchids, as well as looking out for birds including a Rufous Whistler. We enjoyed a late lunch at the Centre. Afterwards we drove to Devil's Kitchen for a short look from the base. A rare Grey Mistletoe was still in flower there and a Mistletoebird was flying around. There was no sign of a Peregrine Falcon nesting, which

sometimes happens on the cliff wall.
A Sat species list will be added to the SEANA website Val Hocking

Enfield Ross Creek Forest Excursion
A highlight of the sunny Saturday afternoon SEANA excursion to Beacon Hill, Incolls Road, Ross Creek State Forest, was a display of Lemon Sun-orchids, *Thelymitra antennifera*. The thirteen participants, after parking to enjoy the views towards Mt Warrenheip and Mt Buninyong, enjoyed exploring the hillside looking at the diverse flora of the site, *Grevillea bedggoodiana, Enfield Grevillea,* was flowering as was Dwarf Boronia *Boronia nana,* .

Our second stop, after a drive through the diverse vegetation types of Enfield State Park, along Berringa-Misery Creek Road, was to another orchid hot spot near the Berringa Historic Area. Two types of Greenhoods, Tiger Orchids, Caladenias and Showy Violets were a feature. The highlight for some keen observers was to see a wasp pollinating a Small Spider-orchid, for others it was seeing a Southern Water-skink. *Eulamprus tympanum*

Elspeth Swan & Paul Norquay

Sat- Grasslands and Woodlands excursion.
Eleven of us, including leader Andy Arnold assisted by Roger Thomas, met at Cape Clear near the 'lighthouse'. We headed to our first stop, the Illabarook Grasslands Flora Reserve. It was a very sunny day, perfect for finding the smaller species in the grassy paddock. Highlights we observed were Golden Moth Orchids, Common Rice Flower and Running Postman and a number of other species..

Our second stop, a short way down the road near Moonlight Road, was the site of the old railway station near the Illabarook Hall. Highlights we observed were Purple Wiregrass, Banksia Marginata and Salmon Sun Orchid.
After Illbarook we headed up to the Dereel Hall for lunch in the sun.

Our first stop in the afternoon was down to the Rokewood Cemetery. There are two large grassy paddocks at the entrance to the cemetery, and at the edge of the road reserve we found 94 Button Wrinklewort, a critically endangered species. We then drove up to the Dereel Bushland Reserve H26.. This area has had some mining activity but we managed to find Nodding Greenhood Orchids.

Alasdair Wardle

Sat- Scarsdale Trust For Nature property and sustainable house.
We met Kathy at her home for a morning visit. April Newton from Trust for Nature was also there. She is a Senior Project Officer, South Central Area.
The property, owned by Kathy and her late husband Bill, consists of 20 acres of woodland and has a Trust for Nature covenant. We had a wander around the paths marked out among the trees. Yellow Scented Sun-orchids were in bud in one spot. Quite a few Waxlip orchids and Blue Stars were to be seen. We had a great view of a Sacred Kingfisher near a water hole. A good patch of Common Bird-orchids in flower were also seen near the house.

Kathy then showed us the various sustainable features that are incorporated in the house, which is off grid. The house is a curved shape giving better protection from bush fires. It also has special ventilation features. Solar panels charge batteries under the house, which provide sufficient power for most of the year. A back-up generator comes on automatically when required, usually in winter when the daylight hours are shorter. There is a wood stove for heating and some cooking, fuelled by the ample piles of wood that are near the house. A large bladder type water tank is also under the house and can be topped up from a regular tank. All waste is treated on the property in a worm farm waste system. Val H

Sat- Full day to "Chepstowe" & Lake Goldsmith, Stockyard Hill
A small but enthusiastic group gathered at the gates of "Chepstowe" to take up Neville's generous offer to showcase his property's environmental highlights. "Chepstowe" is an 800-hectare working farm where environmental management is a major focus. Our first stop was a grassland area that had not been stocked for over twenty years. We compared several management approaches — areas scraped and reseeded with native grassland species, others regularly burned to suppress introduced grasses, and sections where little restoration had been done. The regularly burned areas were particularly impressive, supporting many native species returning in strong numbers and demonstrating that patient, dedicated management can achieve real restoration success.
After a pleasant lunch at the Stockyard Creek Community Hall, we visited Lake Goldsmith. Although the receding water limited the number of birdlife, we agreed that the site deserved a return visit under better conditions.
Personal highlights included trying to distinguish between the Golden Moth Orchid (*Diuris chryseopsis*) and the Golden Cowslip

(*Diuris behrii*), both recorded at "Chepstowe" — a challenge that deepened my appreciation of their beauty. Another memorable moment came from lifting the strategically placed tiles on the grassland and finding a surprising number of Little Whip Snakes (*Suta flagellum*).
The group was very appreciative of Neville's time, knowledge, and passion, and his clear commitment to environmental management and restoration made the excursion both informative and inspiring.

Max Thompson

On Saturday a half day was spent at Lake Wendouree and the North Garden Wetlands. Led by John Gregurke and assisted by Shirley and Mark M

Sun - A full day visit to Creswick forests (Regional and State), St George's Lake, La Gerche Trail and Slatey Creek.
Eleven people set out, led by John Petheram with Margaret Rich assisting.
We drove in convoy through Creswick State Forest to our first stop at 600 m also on the Great Divide, to talk about water catchments, forest management and the importance of water to gold mining. There was a large patch of bird orchids flowering where we stopped.

Water continued to be the theme of the next stop at Russell's Dam. We followed Robertsons' water race for about 500 metres and spoke of the history and business of water races and their necessity for gold mining in the Creswick area.
Morning tea at St George's Lake was enlivened by the sight of a musk duck floating by.

We then drove to La Gerche Gully. Near his statue, John P talked about the work of John La Gerche, the pioneer Crown Lands Bailiff and Forester. Some of the group walked the whole trail. Others walked part of it, then returned to St George's Lake for lunch.

On re-gathering , the whole group drove to Slatey Creek in Creswick Regional Park. Parking near the Drift over Petticoat Rd, the group was delighted to see a number of people with families earnestly panning for gold.
We walked to the Aboriginal ceremonial site and explored it thoroughly, before walking from there to Ah Young's unusual Chinese Market Garden site.
These last two sites had the best display of wildflowers -18 species including three orchids, though we felt the main season was yet to come.

We ended the excursion at Slatey Creek and as this was the end of the SEANA Conference, our participants departed to their various home 'countries'. Margaret Rich

Sun– visit to Lal Lal- Bungal Historical area and Lal Lal Falls
Starting at Lal Lal station, Andy pointed out interesting traces in the landscape of geological and human history, including the former Lal Lal swamp. The Wathaurong people previously used this area in its natural state for resources they needed to survive, thrive and practice their unique culture and customs.

We proceeded to the historic blast furnace, and visited one of the iron mines nearby. Lal Lal is an important site historically, not only because of alluvial gold mining in the area, but also because it became a partner in Ballarat's booming mines and economic growth in the 1870s. The development of an industrial economy in Ballarat came as deep quartz reef mining evolved and required heavy mechanical equipment. Thus came the need for locally produced iron and all the products that could be made from it. The early railways and the original tramway serviced the Iron Blast furnace, built on the banks of the West Moorabool River. The Melbourne-Geelong to Ballarat Railway was important for bringing some of the raw materials needed for the furnace. They were transferred to the tramway, as well as the lignite from the Mt Doran pit required for the operation of the blast furnace. The smelter worked until 1883 after which many obstacles including financial, caused it to be shut down. While here, one of the Parks Victoria Rangers for the area came by and was able to answer a few questions.

Twining Fringe-lilies, Waxlip Orchids and Pink Finger Orchids were flowering in this area. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and Crimson Rosella were among the bird life seen and heard. There were lots of recent echidna diggings, but no animals were spotted.

We then proceeded to Lal Lal Falls and the Eugene Von Gerard Lookout, where the artist had painted one of his famous landscapes in 1856. Only a trickle of water was flowing over the steep drop. Welcome Swallow were nesting in the picnic shelter. Several insects were observed, and a flock of Straw-necked Ibis were in a nearby paddock.

Vireya J & Andy A:

Woowookarung Regional Park

Leader- John Gregurke Facilitator- Angela Aldred

On Sunday afternoon our group of 13 met at the start of the Dementia Friendly Forest and Sensory trail in the Woowookarung Regional Park. Jeff Rootes from the Friends of Canadian Corridor explained how the Friends had worked hard to gain funding to create this world-first dementia sensory trail, to inclusively showcase this very attractive part of the forest. We strolled along the wide, wheelchair-friendly trail as it meandered through the predominantly Stringybark and Peppermint forest. Grass trees were widespread. Fortunately for the group, our visit coincided with the joint Friends and FNCB annual Wildflower Walk, with pictorial and explanatory cards posted next to examples of the local wildflowers. Although the

dry winter had decreased the wildflowers on display, our visitors were surprised at the variety of flowers in bloom. A highlight was the newly- discovered colony of Common Bird Orchids in flower near the start of the trail. Angela A

Sun- Full day visit to Mt Beckworth + Lakes Learmonth and Burrumbeet Led by Roger Thomas and assisted by Max T

A full contingent of twenty participants joined Roger for an excursion to Mt Beckworth, where he generously shared his extensive knowledge of the area. The Mt Beckworth Scenic Reserve, an open woodland dominated by Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Long-leaved Box (*E. goniocalyx*), provided a perfect backdrop for exploration.

Our first stop was the dam, now showing its humble origins as a gravel pit due to receding water levels. Yet, under Roger's guidance, this unassuming spot revealed a remarkable array of tiny, intricate plants that soon had us kneeling or crouching to admire and photograph their delicate beauty.

We then moved into an open woodland meadow, transformed into a tapestry of blues, purples and yellows. Orchids were abundant, including Waxlip Orchids (*Glossodia major*), Lemon-scented Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra antennifera*), Spotted Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra ixioides*), Plain Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra nuda*), and Purplish Beard Orchids (*Calochilus robertsonii*). Golden Moths (*Diuris chryseopsis*) were particularly plentiful, though identification was challenged by their hybridisation with the Leopard Orchid (*Diuris pardina*). The emerging Chocolate Lilies (*Arthropodium strictum*) promised to extend the purple display in the coming weeks, complemented beautifully by Bulbine Lilies (*Bulbine bulbosa*) and Blue Stars (*Chamaescilla corymbosa*). It was truly a breathtaking sight.

To conclude the day, Roger led us to Lake Learmonth, where we swapped magnifying lenses for binoculars to enjoy the birdlife.

The group expressed heartfelt thanks to Roger for a wonderful and informative day, enriched by his enthusiasm, insight, and deep understanding of the landscape.

Max Thompson

Lemon-scented Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra antennifera*), Image Elspeth S

86th Australian Natural History Medallion awarded to Roger Thomas.

On Monday 10th November, twelve members of our Club made their way by various means to Blackburn in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Here, in the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria's hall, we were welcomed by members of the FNCV to a very special event a long time in the making: the presentation of the Australian Natural History Medallion for 2025 to FNCB Life Member Roger Thomas.

But first, here is a little background information to the event. Each year, this medal is presented to just one person for their outstanding contribution to furthering interest and knowledge in Australian Natural History. Detailed nomination dossiers are assessed by an independent Awards Committee made up of representatives from numerous organisations including the FNCV and the Royal Societies of both South Australia and Victoria. Unsuccessful nominations from the previous two years are also re-considered.

In April 2024, not long after the FNCV had invited nominations for that year's ANHM, a car-load of FNCB members on their way to a club field trip to Long Forest discussed possibilities. One member stood out as an exceptional candidate who eminently fulfilled the eligibility criteria: Roger Thomas. We had no doubt that we could write a very compelling and competitive nomination, thanks to his outstanding contributions on numerous fronts over more than 50 years. However, we knew we had no hope of gathering all of the requisite evidence before the deadline for 2024 nominations, so we started planning for 2025.

At Committee Meetings and in between them, we started writing lists and collating records of all of the areas in which Roger had had significant impact on the valuing, appreciation, documenting, understanding and care of nature in the Ballarat region, his professional work and volunteer roles, personal attributes and character. We wondered if a year would be long enough to do justice to the documenting of so many contributions. Nevertheless, we continued on, very thankful that we had made the most of the opportunity to have all of our Club's newsletters digitised in the Biodiversity Heritage Library's project "Sharing the history of Victoria's Field Naturalists" in 2023-24. It was wonderful to have the gold-mine of information within them readily accessible and searchable.

We rejoiced too when Susan Kruss's PhD Thesis titled "A Voice for Nature: A History of the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat" was circulated in June 2024 and we found it to be full of details about Roger's multi-pronged achievements. In case we needed any further motivation, the announcement of Roger's pending retirement from authoring "Nature Notes" for *The Courier* hardened our resolve to complete a comprehensive nomination.

We believed that his vast contributions to our Club and to public education through his *Nature Notes* column could have been sufficient on their own to warrant the awarding of the ANHM. However, we couldn't overlook his enormous contributions in fostering the interest and knowledge of natural history in so many other individuals and organisations, so we sought letters of support and information from them, with more than a dozen responding promptly, enthusiastically and with great affection for Roger.

A ten-page nomination dossier was submitted at 7.35pm on the closing date for nominations, June 30, 2025, along with the Nomination Form, thirteen letters of support, seven other supporting documents and 24 photos.

Three-and-a-half months later, we received the news we had been keenly hoping for: Roger Thomas has been assessed as the successful candidate for the ANHM 2025 and would be awarded the Medallion at a special event to be organised shortly. Roger could not have been more surprised, humbled and honoured! So, less than four weeks later, here we were to witness Roger receiving this prestigious award. Six FNCB Committee Members attended along with six other members, plus Roger's wife Fran and their daughter May who had travelled across from Tasmania especially. A couple of members of BirdLife Ballarat came too, as well as three volunteers who had worked with Roger at the City of Ballarat Indigenous Plant Nursery and elsewhere.

Members of the FNCV provided a wonderful meal for about 25 of the event attendees, with another 15 or so people arriving after dinner for the Medallion presentation and Roger's talk. President of the FNCV, Maxwell Campbell, warmly welcomed attendees and acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land upon which we were meeting. He warmly announced the winner of this year's medallion as Roger Thomas for "his contribution to Public Education, Conservation, Birds and Botany", noting that it was a unanimous decision from those on the Award Committee. He also

thanked Neville Oddie, President of the Club who submitted the successful nomination and other members of that club for attending, before handing over to Rob Day, Council Member of The Royal Society of Victoria, representing RSV President Rob Gell.

Rob shared a brief overview of the expansive scope and highlights of Roger's contributions to furthering interest and knowledge of Australian natural history, duly illuminating Roger's worthiness as the 2025 ANHM winner, before handing him the beautiful bronze Medallion set in timber and glass and inscribed with "Roger Thomas 10.11.2025".

Roger humbly accepted the award and noted the honour and surprise he felt in receiving it, especially after reading the write-up of the daunting credentials of last year's winner in "The Victorian Naturalist". A few photos of Roger with the Medallion and Rob and Maxwell were taken, and Roger stepped across to the lectern to present "Ballarat's Nature Noted: a retrospective of Nature Writing over four decades."

We sat there listening with pride as Roger brought himself and the FNCB much honour in his captivating presentation about chronicling and interpreting the cycles and changes and trends and seasons, threats and highlights in Ballarat's natural world for 41 years in his widely-beloved "Nature Notes" column in *The Courier*.

Many thanks to Fran and May Thomas for providing Roger with the IT skills to put his wonderful Powerpoint presentation together, to the FNCV for hosting a great event, and to Roger Thomas for being an exceptional, impactful, inspirational field naturalist who so willingly shares his knowledge and puts it to great use in efforts to encourage appreciation, preservation and protection of the natural environment in our region. How lucky we are to have a member of your calibre and character!

By Emily Noble

20/11/25
To all FNCB members who have so warmly embraced my receipt of the Australian Natural History Medallion, I offer my grateful thanks. Your support has been humbling and almost overwhelming. Some of you even supported me at the dinner and award ceremony at FHCV headquarters in Blackburn - a daunting trip! I have received many congratulatory messages in recent weeks, but among the most treasured have been those from my FNCB friends. My thanks to you all. Roger Thomas.

Roger Thomas' presentation of the Australian Natural History Medallion by Rob Day, the Council Member of the Royal Society of Victoria, at the FNCV club rooms Blackburn 10th Nov

Max Campbell President of FNC Vic with Roger T and Rob Day

February 2026 Field trip

We are hiring the Golden City Paddle Steamer to enable Bird watching in the centre of Lake Wendouree
Date Sunday 8th February from 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm.
-Leaving from their boat shed opposite Nazareth House, Wendouree Parade Ballarat.
There will be a limit of 30 passengers. Cost will be $20 per person payable in cash on the day.
Please note—this event is weather dependant. The ferry ride can only take place in fine calm weather.

Firm Bookings can now be taken– email Val Hocking <vhocking37@gmail.com> and also give your phone number– in order for us to contact you if the trip has to be cancelled.

Our next club meeting

Friday 5th December at 7.30 pm at our Fed Uni rooms Gillies St
Speaker—Our President Neville Oddie

"Chepstowe – reflections on a life on the land focussing on nature and natural events – and some unnatural events".

Our end of year Field Trip - Sunday afternoon 7th December, led by Neville Oddie

Either meet at Fed Uni carpark Gillies St at 1 pm or travel direct to Neville's property and arrive by 1.30 pm.
The address is "Chepstowe", 346 Carngham- Streatham Road, Chepstowe. It is about 35 km west from Ballarat Central, near Snake Valley. Stay on sealed roads and look out for a white letter box and 3 wind turbines.

We will visit several sites on the farm until 5.30pm. Anybody arriving after the starting time can ring Neville on his mobile number: **0447 546 164** to find out where the group is.

Please wear robust footwear and long trousers to protect from any snakes. At 5.30pm there will be a BYO picnic tea at the homestead. There are toilets at the homestead. Please bring a chair if possible – we have plenty, but we don't want to run out.

We need a volunteer to write up this event for the Newsletter please!

Meetings and Excursions

Fri Dec 5th Speaker Neville Oddie *Chepstowe*
Sun Dec 7th 1.30 pm Christmas break-up: at Chepstowe
Leader Neville Oddie

Future events
Fri Feb 6th Speaker Tim Read, City of Ballarat
-His role and the City of Ballarat's Biodiversity Strategy

Sun Feb 8th 4.30 pm Paddle steamer cruise on Lake Wendouree bird watching, weather permitting.

Volunteers are needed to write up these events for our newsletter please.

Next Committee meeting Thur 29th Jan at 5 pm at Emily's home. Bring a picnic tea and ideas for 2026/27 planning.

Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at 7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Website: http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com
Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com
Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.
Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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